TOP SECRET [redacted]

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SOVIET EXPLANATION OF ANTHRAX ACCIDENT IN SVERDLOVSK: THE DECEPTION CONTINUES ~~(S NF)~~

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Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)

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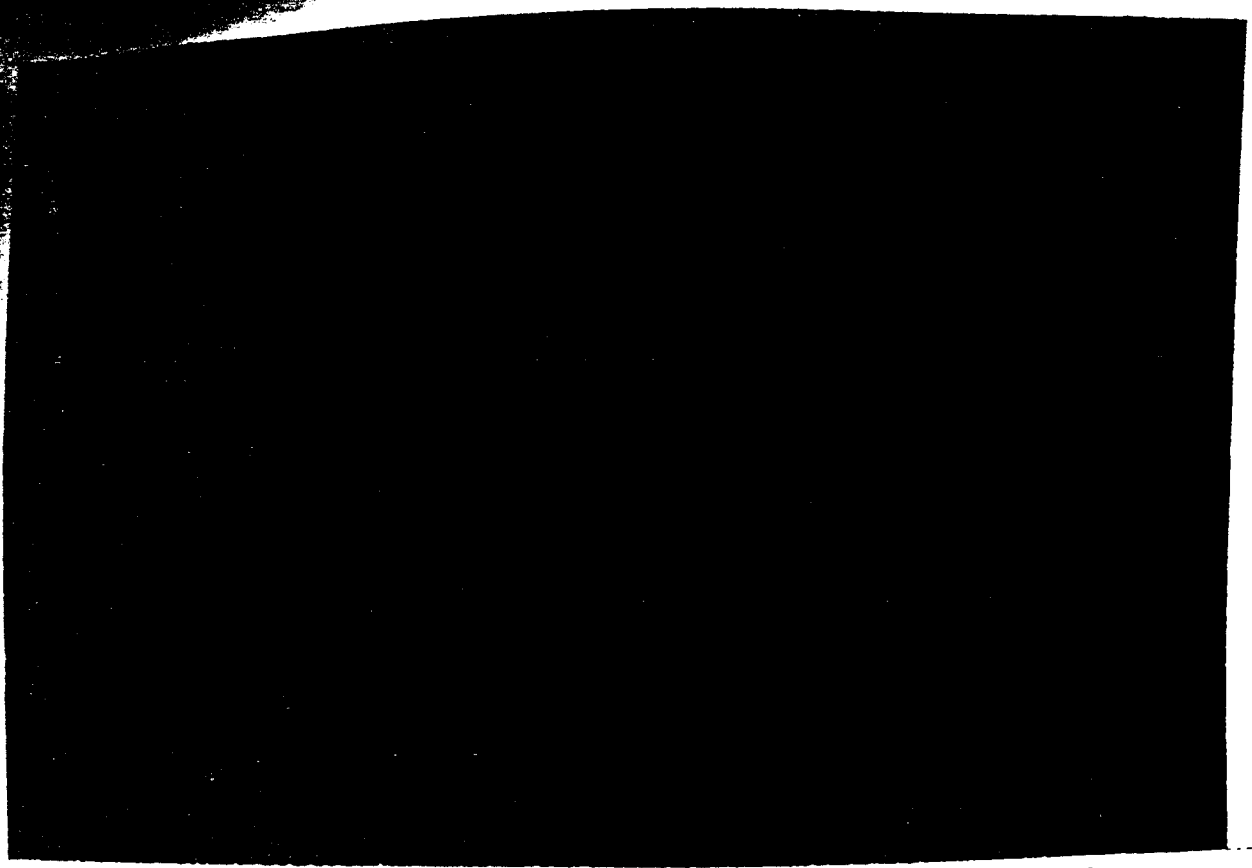

May 1980 - Two Soviet scientists, I.S. Bezdenezhnykh and V.N. Nikiforov, published an article in the leading Soviet microbiological journal titled "Epidemiological Analysis of Anthrax in Sverdlovsk." They reviewed the history of anthrax in the Sverdlovsk region, and stated:

> "There is no doubt of the possibility of infection during the slaughter and dressing of the carcasses of animals infected with anthrax or from use of infected meat and meat products for food. It also is known that spores in meat die only after intensive heat treatment. Nevertheless, meat partially rendered harmless rarely causes several illnesses in a single family. One person usually proves to be ill."

The theme of one case per family will reappear in 1986. Also, Nikiforov was to become one of the three man delegation to the US in 1988. ~~(U)~~

The two Soviet scientists then described a contaminated meat-borne outbreak, including recovery of anthrax germs from stored meat from

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refrigerators of two families. Another case was described as a cutaneous form of anthrax in a person who became infected slaughtering a diseased sheep. They also stated that air sampling from dwellings and hospital wards as well as the wipings of utensils showed that patients were not contagious. They did not mention the extent of the outbreak, nor were any deaths mentioned. (U)

11 August 1980 - An article in a Soviet legal review discussed the trial of two farmers for the sale of uninspected and infected meat from one calf and three sheep. It was stated that the meat sold was responsible for causing two cases of human anthrax. No deaths were mentioned. Disposal of a diseased cow carcass in an abandoned mine shaft was described. (FOUO)

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Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)

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New Information in the 1988 Account and Our Evaluation

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First, the Soviets named Major General V. I. Agafonov as being a visitor to Sverdlovsk (presumably during the epidemic). While on other military business, he consulted with Burgasov, ostensibly because he happened to be in the area. During discussions at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in Washington, Burgasov identified Agafonov as from the Urals Military District, but later during the same meeting he was identified as a member of the Ministry of Health team from Moscow investigating the epidemic. Burgasov did not refute this military connection, but he again emphasized there was no military involvement in the control of the epidemic. (U)

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Second, the Soviets claimed that the carcass of a cow which died of anthrax was found in an abandoned mineshaft. Dr. Nikiforov stated that he analyzed a sample from it, and found that it tested positive for anthrax. (U)

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Third, the Soviets argued that, if the anthrax spores had been spread by airborne dissemination, many cases in children would have been expected. In 1988 they reported that only one child was infected. They explained that since children ate their meals in schools or nurseries, where only inspected meat was served, they were not exposed to any of the contaminated black-market meat. (U)

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Credibility of the Soviet Fabrication

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Reporting of gastrointestinal cases only also provides plausible explanations of some previously unexplained quirks of the Soviet story. For instance, when questioned about the predominance of single male victims, one to a household, the Soviets provided the following explanation at the National Academy of Sciences:

> "Families sometime purchase black-market meat. In this instance, the meat was contaminated with anthrax. The male head-of-household always receives the largest portion of meat served at a meal." (U)

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This plausibility is offset if the 1988 explanation is compared to the 1986 version as presented by Dr. Meselson during a briefing at the Department of State. In that version there was an elaborate discussion of Russian customs for cooking meat slowly by simmering, which was stated to only partially sterilize the anthrax spores, and also proposed that men were more vulnerable due to ulcers or gastritis resulting from alcohol intake. (U)

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Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)